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Driving While Pregnant - What To Expect

Along with the joys of pregnancy come worries about the well being of your unborn child. Don't let getting behind the wheel fray your nerves. Here are answers to common safety concerns about driving while you're pregnant.

I've heard that in an accident the seat belt could harm my unborn child. Should I drive without it?

"Absolutely not," says Carole Guzzetta, highway safety specialist with the Washington, DC based National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Apart from the fact law requires using a seat belt, it's also Guzzetta's number one safety tip for expectant moms. But be sure to put it on properly. Position the shoulder strap high across your chest but away from your neck, and place the lap belt below your abdomen and across the hips and upper thighs. Pregnant women should never place the lap belt above or on their abdomens.

Can air bags harm my baby or me?

Air bags, used in conjunction with safety belts, save lives; however, they can injure or even kill vehicle occupants if used improperly. According to NHTSA, all drivers can minimize air bag dangers by wearing a seat belt, by positioning the seat far enough back to give at least 10 inches of clearance between body and steering wheel or dash, by sitting back against the seat back, and by not leaning forward. These suggestions are even more critical for pregnant drivers. New advanced frontal air bags require the same precautions. For more detailed safety tips, visit www.nhtsa.gov.

I've seen devices that position the seat belt properly for a pregnant driver. Do I need one?

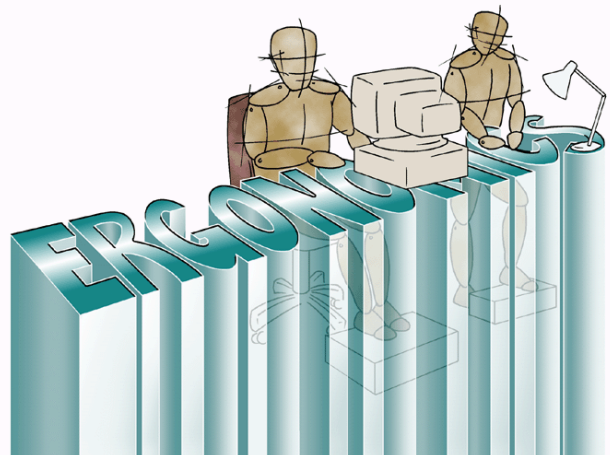
If you struggle to keep your seat belt in position, try one. Theodore Bean's Mom-To-Maternity Seat Belt Positioning Device (pictured) is easy to use and helpful in keeping the lap belt low on the hips. Because it might be difficult

to locate in area stores, consider buying it through an online baby-supplies retailer. Get more information at (877) 688-2326 or at www.onestepahead.com. However, keep in mind, Guzzetta says, that there are no federal motor-vehicle safety standards on such aftermarket products.

Should I stop driving at a certain point in my pregnancy?

Let common sense be your guide when deciding whether it's safe for you to be behind the wheel. If you are having a normal pregnancy, you should be able to continue driving as long as you feel comfortable doing so. But because each pregnancy is different, ask your doctor for advice as your pregnancy progresses.

Marry Morales wrote this article and permission to publish it was granted by Hawaii Westways Lifestyle and Travel for the Islands magazine.



Avoiding A Painful Back!

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, back injuries account for one of every five injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Eighty percent of these injuries occur to the lower back and are associated with manual materials handling tasks. Re-aggravation of a previous injury almost always results from a new incident, which involves the employee (i.e., slip, twist, trip, extended reach). Lifting-related injuries include sprains, strains, neural related, neuromuscular related injuries and/or bone related injuries. These injuries can affect any part of the body, but the majority occurs to the lower back.

There is, however, a correlation between injury claims for low back pain and physical activities such as lifting, bending, twisting, pushing, pulling, etc. Cures remain unclear and back pain whether treated or untreated, can subside quickly or linger. Back pain can re-occur at any

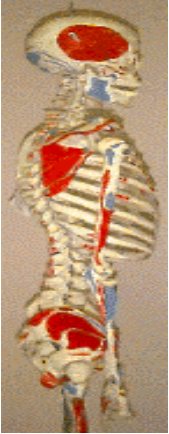
time. The bottom line is that YOU bear the responsibility for preventing back injury. The following tips can help you maintain a healthy back.

GET TO KNOW YOUR BACK!

Your back is composed of vertebrae, discs, nerves and muscles.

Vertebrae (33 in number) are cylindrical bones, which enclose the spinal cord, stacked vertically together, and separated by discs to form the vertebral column or spine.

The spine's basic functions include providing support, protecting the spinal cord, and providing flexibility to allow bending and rotating.



When normally aligned, the spine forms 3 natural curves (cervical, thoracic, lumbar). Maintaining these natural curves keeps the spine in balance.

Discs (articular pads composed of dense fibro cartilage) lie between each vertebrae. Each disc contains a jelly-like center surrounded by rings of tough fibrous tissue. These discs act as "spinal shock absorbers" during activities such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, etc.

Nerves are a collection of fibers, which carry electrical impulses throughout the body. The spinal cord stretches the length of the spine through the vertebral column. Smaller nerves branch out between each vertebrae to carry messages around the body.

Muscles, Ligaments, Tendons are tissues in the body, which provide support and contact to produce movement. Ligaments are bands of fibrous tissue that connect bones or cartilage together - serving to support and strengthen joints. Tendons are fibrous cords of connective tissue, which attach muscle to bone.

RECOGNIZE THE 4 LEADING BACK INJURY RISK FACTORS!

- ❖ Poor posture
- ❖ Poor physical condition
- ❖ Improper body mechanics
- ❖ Incorrect lifting

Be willing to change your posture habits! Our bodies are designed to move, bend and flex - and our posture changes to fit the task. Static posture leads to discomfort and lower productivity. Be aware of your posture while working.

Maintain a neutral posture. When you assume a neutral posture, your body will find its natural balance. Adjust your worksite to fit you before you begin the task. Neutral posture includes keeping wrists straight not bent or twisted.

While sitting -

- ❖ Keep your head balanced naturally over your shoulders (not protruding in front of your body).
- ❖ Keep your shoulders relaxed not hunched.
- ❖ Keep your forearms and thighs parallel to the floor.
- ❖ Sit back in your chair for support (not on the front edge).
- ❖ Settle your feet on the floor or footrest.

While standing -

- ❖ Keep your spinal column aligned in its natural curves.
- ❖ Prop one foot up on a stool to reduce stress in your lower back.

Stretch often! & Shift positions! -

- ❖ Change (shift) your posture often.
- ❖ Stretch frequently throughout the day.
- ❖ Keep your body flexible (not rigid or fixed; static posture becomes uncomfortable and decreases productivity).

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY! BE CAREFUL!

Feeling discomfort or pain is an indication that something is wrong! **Heed the signs!** Combinations of awkward posture, force, repetitions, and insufficient rest periods are a set up for injury. Take more frequent "mini-breaks" before you become fatigued. Become aware of mounting stresses, aches, and pains.

Handle Materials Carefully... Did you know?

- ❖ An average woman's arm and torso can lift 60% as much as a man's?
- ❖ At age 65, the average person's strength is 75% of someone who is 20 or 25. Endurance remains similar.
- ❖ Manual material handling accounts for 30% to 40% of the worker's compensation claims in the U.S.? *Therefore...*

Lift with common sense! Remember - no single technique will work in all circumstances. Be careful!

When you lift...Do Not....

- ❖ Lift from the floor
- ❖ Twist and lift
- ❖ Lift with one hand (unbalanced)
- ❖ Lift loads across obstacles
- ❖ Lift while reaching or stretching
- ❖ Lift from an uncomfortable posture
- ❖ Don't fight to recover a dropped object
- ❖ Don't hold your breath while lifting - GET HELP

Remember your workday is one third of your total day.

Plan your tasks carefully to avoid a painful back.

Managing your back is your responsibility.

Information for this article is from the University of Virginia ergonomics program

Be Safe!!